



STUDY OF CANADIAN ONLINE CONVERSATIONS SHOW CLIMATE CHANGE IS MOST DISCUSSED AGRICULTURAL ISSUE FOLLOWED BY GMOS



Graphic: vecteezy.com

A Canadian Centre for Food Integrity (CCFI) study of Canadian conversations online on food and farming showed that there isn't any other issue in modern agriculture that generates as much conversation at the national level as the impact that modern farming has on the environment.

More than 2.5 million Canadians

actively discussed the relationship between modern farming and climate change over the course of two years, according to the study called *Public Opinion: a study of Canadian conversations online on food and farming*.

"To build public trust in our Canadian food system, understanding first, what Canadians

are thinking and discussing about food and how it's grown, is integral to addressing consumer demands and questions," said Arnie Strub, CCFI Chief Operating Officer. "Understanding what topics consumers are discussing, how they're accessing information online and on what platforms, and how age and regional perspective also is a factor,

provides greater insights for us on how to disseminate information as an industry and learn what our consumers want to hear more about, to better tell our stories to further garner trust in our food system through shared values.”

The research showed that GMOs and climate change are the top agricultural issues discussed by Canadians in that time period, and “the share of voice on other niche topics, such as animal welfare, are being greatly magnified by select activist groups and amplified by news media attention.”

CCFI is a national charity with a mandate as a service provider to help Canada’s food system earn trust by coordinating research, dialogue, resources and training. Tactix was commissioned by CCFI to utilize a powerful artificial intelligence (AI) public opinion research tool that crawled across several social media platforms and scientifically measured public sentiment of 254,900 Canadians between January 2017 and January 2019. By ‘listening’ to discussions across social media platforms, the AI tool can determine how many Canadians are concerned about an issue without being primed with and influenced by questions.

The overall research objective of this study was to uncover how Canadians are discussing topics that matter to the entire food system (i.e. farmers, food processors, food retailers, and government). The research covered topics related to food, health, farm practices and specifically GMOs, hormones, antibiotics and pesticides.

The report stated that “while Canadians have varying opinions on the four individual technologies examined within the research (GMOs, pesticides, hormones and antibiotics), there is one common theme all Canadians firmly associate



John Jamieson, Canadian Centre of Food Integrity President and CEO.

with each of these technologies: farmers. Farmers are associated with these technologies more than any other member of the value chain proving that farmers are the front line and wear the issue when it comes to public opinion.”

This is demonstrated in the statistics that 59% of the analyzed discussions associated pesticides with farmers, while only 21% associated pesticides with government, and only 10% with scientists. The results are similar for hormones, antibiotics, and GMOs. The study also found that while GMOs were the least associated with farmers at 41%, this is still substantially more than the number of discussions that associate GMOs with the next closest stakeholder (government at 26%).

The report states that “the implications on future messaging is significant; Canadians are not predisposed towards listening to assurances about government

regulatory safety measures because government is not the primary stakeholder that is associated with the technology. In contrast, farmers have compelling stories and can act as key figures for educating the general public on agriculture issues. And when it comes to retailers, Canadians do not see a role for them in telling the story about why farmers need access to technologies.”

To read the entire report, please visit www.foodintegrity.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Canadian-CFI-E-News-May-2019.pdf.

Meanwhile a new President & CEO started leading the Canadian Centre for Food Integrity in June. John Jamieson has more than 25 years of senior leadership within Canada’s agri-food sector with a passion for advancing public trust. Jamieson succeeds outgoing President Crystal Mackay, who provided valuable leadership as the inaugural President, CCFI said in a news release.

“I am thoroughly excited to take on this new role and to work with the CCFI Board of Directors and industry members to advance trust in Canada’s top-quality food system,” Jamieson said.

Jamieson comes to CCFI after serving as the Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries and the Deputy Minister of Rural and Regional Development in Prince Edward Island. He previously served as the Executive Director of the Prince Edward Island Federation of Agriculture and has a wealth of knowledge working with various commodity organizations. Jamieson is also a Professional Agrologist and Certified Nutrient Management Planner and was previously on the Farm and Food Care Foundation Board of Directors and the Dalhousie University’s Faculty of Agriculture Advisory Committee.